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UPSC CSE 2026



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AFFAIRS NOTES

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Centre's green panel gives its nod to Stage 2 Dulhasti hydel power project in J&K

- A panel under the Ministry of Environment has approved the 260-megawatt Dulhasti Stage 2 hydropower project on the Chenab river in Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar.
- The clearance comes against the backdrop of India suspending the Indus Waters Treaty with Pakistan following the Pahalgam terror attack.
- When the Indus Water Treaty was in force, Pakistan had rights over the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab rivers, and India over the Ravi, Beas and Sutlej.
- With the **treaty now in abeyance**, the Centre is pushing ahead with several hydroelectric projects in the Indus basin, such as Sawalkote, Ratle, Bursar, Pakal Dul, Kwar, Kiru, and Kirthai I and II.
- Dulhasti Stage 2 is an extension of the 390-MW Dulhasti Stage I hydroelectric project (Dulhasti Power Station).
- The **Dulhasti Power Station** has been **successfully operating since 2007** by the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation Limited.

Rajasthan expedites installation of rooftop solar power plants

- Installation of rooftop solar power plants is being expedited in Rajasthan under the revamped distribution sector scheme (RDSS) to reduce transmission and distribution losses and improve power supply quality.
- Fixing meters on transformers has also been **taken up rigorously** under the RDSS.
- The Centre's nodal agency for RDSS is the Rural Electrification Corporation (REC).
- Aggregate technical and commercial losses had decreased from 17.49% in 2021-22 prior to the sanction of RDSS works to 14.26% in 2024-25.
- The RDSS is aimed at **modernising power distribution** and making it more **efficient and financially stable**, with focus on **smart metering, infrastructure upgrades and reforms**, while **funding is linked to performance targets**.

How India has managed to weave 'RCEP minus China'

- India is in a position to reap the benefits such a grouping would have provided, without exposing itself to the risks. This **strategy has given India market access without surrendering tariff control to China**.
- The RCEP countries are the **10 ASEAN members** (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam), Australia, China, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand.
- The fear was this would **provide China virtually duty-free access** to the Indian market.
- **'RCEP minus China' strategy** is a far superior one to joining RCEP itself.
- India and China are currently signatories to the Asia Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA), which is a preferential trade pact that provides **lower tariffs on a few items** rather than an **FTA**, which typically **lowers most tariffs to zero**. Joining RCEP would have even been worse for India than signing a direct FTA with China.
- A bilateral deal with China would allow India to **exclude sensitive sectors** and **pace liberalisation**. RCEP's integrated structure would have **diluted safeguards** and **enabled indirect entry of Chinese goods via other members**.

How India's crude oil import basket has undergone change over years

- Historically, **energy security** for the world's third-largest oil consumer India has been about navigating the prevailing geopolitics whilst ensuring a **positive economics** for purchase of **crude oil**.
- From Saudi Arabia accounting for two-thirds of oil imports, to Russia emerging as the major supplier, New Delhi's **crude oil basket** has seen **multiple policy shifts** over the years.
- Before **2005**, over **70%** of the crude oil came from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait and UAE. From **2005 to 2015**, crude oil supplies **broadened** to include Nigeria and Angola in Africa and Venezuela in South America.
- In **2010**, the **U.N. Security Council** sanctioned Iran to stop them from acquiring **weapons**. Iran's share in India's crude basket dropped to **6.2%** in **2015-16**. Sanctions on Iran were lifted in **2016**. In later years, Tehran's share in India's oil imports fell to a little over **10%**.
- **Russia** accounted for **less than 2%** of India's crude oil imports in **2021-22**. This jumped to **21.6%** in **2022-23**. **Russia's share** further went up to **35.9%** in **2023-24**. It stood at **35.8%** in **2024-25**. At present, oil from **Moscow** accounts for one-third of the overall crude import basket.

Twenty-first century solutions to snake bites

- Snake venoms generally cause three types of damage: **blood disorders, muscle paralysis, and tissue death**.
- Viper bites commonly cause **blood-related disorders**, while elapid snakes (like **cobras**) typically trigger **nerve-related paralysis**.

- A standard antivenom has been designed against the venom of India's '**Big Four**' species: **spectacled cobra, common krait, Russell's viper, and saw-scaled viper**. Venom from these snakes is needed for making this antivenom.
- Most of India's requirement of **snake venom** is met by snakes captured in **paddy fields** and **scrublands of Tamil Nadu** by tribals of the **Irula Snake Catcher's Industrial Co-operative Society**.
- A **cocktail of venoms** from the **four species** is injected into **horses** in **non-lethal doses**, and the animals are **hyper-immunised** by repeated injections. **Horses are chosen** because they are **large animals** and are **easy to handle**. Their **immune system reacts**, producing **antibodies in large quantities**.
- When ready, **blood is drawn** from the horses. **Plasma containing the antibodies** is processed to isolate **toxin-binding antibody fragments**, which are then **tested, freeze-dried, and distributed in vials**. This **method has been in practice since the 1950s**.
- The **camel family** was chosen because it has **unusual antibodies** that yield small, stable fragments called **nanobodies**.

Is the 'health for all' campaign on track?

- India has been a **beneficiary of PEPFAR (U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief)** and **USAID**, as funds suddenly dried up for certain **key health intervention projects** in the fields of **HIV/AIDS, population services and maternal and child health**.
- **India's health budget** has remained **below 2% of the GDP**. The **National Health Policy** itself set a **target of 2.5% of GDP**.
- **WHO's recent GLASS report** noted that **one in three people** who had **bacterial infections in India** bore **resistant organisms**, against **one in six globally**.
- For India, the report flagged **high resistance rates to major antibiotics**, especially in **serious infections** caused by ***E.coli, Klebsiella pneumoniae, and Staphylococcus aureus***, particularly in **hospital ICUs**.
- The **challenging factors** that aggravate **AMR** are **widespread over-the-counter antibiotic access, self-medication, incomplete courses, environmental contamination, and uneven enforcement of regulations**.
- **Kerala is the only State** where **stewardship in AMR** has led to an **actual lowering of AMR levels in the community**. Other States need to **catch up**, even as they roll out the **second iteration of the National Plan of Action on Antimicrobial Resistance** introduced **this year**.